For the Dying

The sacrament for the dying is the Eucharist, given as *viaticum,* food for the journey into eternal life.

Celebration: If possible, viaticum is given under both forms and is celebrated during Mass.

Otherwise, the priest or minister brings the sacrament. After hearing the word of God, the sick person is invited to make his or her baptismal profession of faith once again. All present share the sign of peace. Communion is given to the dying person as viaticum and then to others who are present. A blessing concludes this celebration.

Responsibility. Every Christian has a serious duty to receive viaticum. The usual laws about fasting do not apply when someone is dying.

Sudden danger of death: When a person suddenly comes into danger of death (accident, heart attack), there is a *continuous rite* celebrated by a priest: sacrament of reconciliation, apostolic pardon, baptismal profession of faith, anointing, viaticum, and blessing.

Continuing care: The Church encourages continuing care of the dying; Communion may be brought each day as viaticum. Family members and friends are invited to visit, to pray with the dying person, to speak, to listen. Often it is appropriate to thank the dying person for what he or she has meant and done for them over the years.

Our Lord has promised to be with us always. Through our prayers and visits he reaches out to touch the dying person in a special way.

Commendation: After death occurs, the priest (or other) minister offers prayers for the one who has died.

Important Notes

Call your parish: When someone in your family or a friend is seriously sick or in hospital or at home for a period of time, call your parish. Discuss the situation and ask for a priest or minister to visit, to pray with the sick person and to arrange for Communion and the other sacraments.

When a person is seriously ill or dying, *call at once* – don't wait until the person is unconscious or barely able to talk or respond.

Preparation: When a sick person is going to receive Communion, prepare a small table nearby, with a clean cloth, lighted candles, blessed water, a cross, a glass of water (and a spoon). Meet the priest or minister at the door and bring him or her to the sick person's room.

Continuing care: Jesus continues to bring his loving care to the sick through us: as we visit them, pray with them, touch them and help them, our Lord is reaching out to them in love.

Loving Father,
have mercy on the sick and the dying.
Teach them to accept their daily cross
with Jesus our Lord,
and make us more gentle and kind
toward all who suffer.

Father, we ask this prayer
through Christ our Lord. Amen!

"I was sick and you took care of me. … Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25. 36, 40), says the Lord.

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HELPING THE SICK AND THE DYING

What we are to do as Church

How our family can help

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Our Tradition

Jesus is the Son of God and became one of us to save us. He is like us in all things but sin; he understands our weakness, sickness and pain. Jesus is our brother in the flesh. During his life on earth, he taught us by his example and word that we are to care with love for the sick and the suffering. This is one important way we can keep his commandment to love others as he did.

His Church: Through the centuries, the people of God have recognized their responsibility to love and help the sick. Religious communities were founded and supported to care for the sick and the dying. Hospitals were built and maintained to look after people in need of such loving care. As well as giving physical care, the Church as the body of Christ celebrates prayers, blessings and sacraments for the comfort and even healing of the sick.

The Second Vatican Council brought about a renewal in spiritual care for the sick and the dying:

The sick feel lonely, useless and cut off from the world and the Church. We are encouraged to pray for them, visit them, pray with them and help them by other acts of love. Holy Communion may be brought to them often.

The seriously sick. As well as sharing in Communion and in prayer, these people may receive the anointing of the sick. Communion is brought to them frequently, even daily.

The dying. The Church's special sacrament for the dying is *viaticum*. Prayers, visits, and blessings are also provided, as for the sick.

Concern for the sick and the dying is the responsibility of both the parish community and all its members, especially those closest to the ones in need.

The Sick

Pastoral care of those who are sick is the responsibility of the parish community and of all its members.

Parish care:

Visits by priests, deacons, pastoral workers and other ministers. The minister will read the Scriptures and pray with the person and may lay hands on his or her head during the prayer. The minister may share parish news and see about the sick person's needs. The minister may bring Communion often, even daily, if the sick person wishes.

Awareness: The parish helps its members to remain aware that they are all to be ministers to Christ's sick brothers and sisters. By remembering them in the prayer of the faithful at Sunday (and daily) Eucharist and by encouraging parishioners to visit them during the week, the parish continues to serve the sick. Some parishes send communion ministers to the sick as an extension of Sunday Mass.

Parishioners can help the sick in many ways:

Visiting. A short visit, every day or frequently. Bring cheerful news.

Pray for the sick person each day. During your visit, offer to pray with him or her.

Scriptures. Offer to read the Sunday gospel or a psalm or another passage from God's word.

Silence. A visit does not have to be filled with sound. A silent time is helpful for everyone.

Touch. Before leaving, hold the person's hand or place a hand on his or her head.

Offer to help by shopping, cleaning, doing errands or other forms of service.

The Seriously Ill

The Church offers the sacrament of anointing to those who are seriously ill or who are feeble because of old age.

Anointing of the sick: Developed from the practice of the apostles (*Mk* 6.13) and of the early Church (*Jas* 5.14-15), this sacrament has been renewed in recent years.

Call the priest whenever a believer becomes seriously ill. The more conscious and alert the person is, the more fully he or she can take part in the celebration and be comforted.

Scripture. The Church – represented by the priest, the sick person and the gathered relatives and friends – listens to the word of God and prays in faith for the patient.

Laying on of hands. In silent prayer, the priest lays his hands on the sick person's head.

Anointing with oil. The priest rubs blessed oil on the person's forehead and hands, saying a brief prayer.

Other sacraments. The sick person may wish to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. After the anointing, Communion may be received. (No eucharistic fast is required of the sick.)

Who can be anointed? Those who are seriously sick; patients before serious surgery; elderly people who are very weak; sick children old enough to understand and be comforted by the sacrament.

Those who have a serious mental illness and who would be strengthened by the sacrament may be anointed.

The sacrament is for the living. The priest does not anoint a dead body, but prays for the one who has died.